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Highway Plans

1. There was a complicated administrative hierarchy for the planning of new highways in the USSR. All highway plans even for relatively insignificant roads had to get the approval of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), the Ministry of War, the Central Highway Administration, as well as get a money outlay from the Government Bank. After 1936 it was also necessary to get the approval of the NKVD which was put directly in the chain of command, mainly due to its function in supervising the large amount of forced labor which was being used for new highway construction, particularly in the Eastern parts of the USSR. The Council of People's Commissars was at the top of the chain of command with the NKVD under it after 1936, and then the Central Highway Administration. The Central Highway Administration was the focal point for the distribution and reception of plans from two sources. Strategic roads of major military significance were handled by the Departmental Administration (otdeleniye upravleniye). These roads were given numerical designations such as # 996. Minor roads and roads of primarily economic significance were administered on the other hand by regional agencies of Road Transportation such as Belorussian Road Transportation (Bel Dor Trans), and the construction was handled by similar regional agencies such as Belorussian Road Construction (Bel Dor Stroite). In addition, all plans were sent from the Council of People's Commissars to the Ministry of War for its approval as well as to the Government Bank for financial disbursements.

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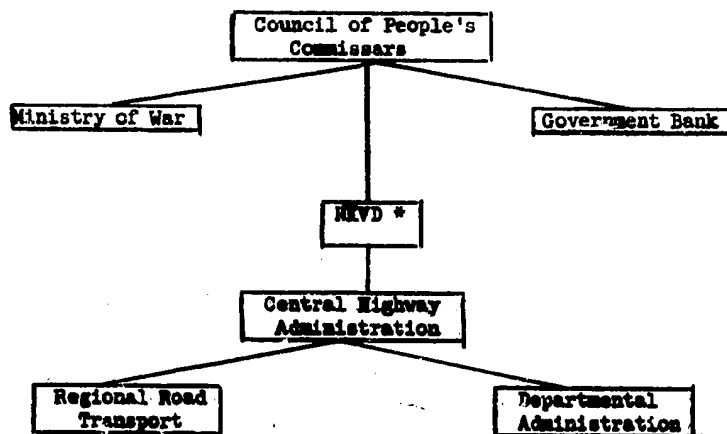
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2. Plans for new roads or highways could be initiated at either the Ministry of War, the Council of People's Commissars, the Central Highway Administration, or the regional agencies of Road Transport such as Bel Dor Trans. No matter where they were initiated, they had to get the tentative approval of the Ministry of War, the Council of People's Commissars, the Central Highway Administration, and after 1936, the NKVD. After this initial approval, plans for strategic, military roads would be sent down to the Departmental Administration and plans for other roads to the regional Road Transportation Agencies. At this level more detailed plans would be formulated which required the final approval all the way up the chain of command before they could be implemented.



\*In chain of command only after 1936

This process naturally consumed a good deal of time and led to long delays in the implementation of new highway construction. It is significant that plans for the construction of minor rural roads, although initiated at the regional Road Transport level, still had to get approval from the very top of the hierarchy in order to be financed by the Government Bank.

3. Military considerations were much more important in the planning of new highways than were economic considerations. Whereas the Ministry of War had to give its approval for the construction of all roads in the USSR, there was no corresponding approval necessary from an economic ministry. In a conflict between military and economic considerations, the military would predominate. All paved roads in the USSR are built primarily for strategic and military reasons, whereas roads serving an economic function are left unpaved. Construction on a road in the Ukraine through Nosha [sic] near the Polish border was initiated in 1939. Work on this road was discontinued in 1941, due to a revision of military estimates by the Ministry of War in the wake of the changed relationship with Germany. Military considerations affect the construction of all types of roads. The Ministry of War requires that all roads have at least two small viaducts every kilometer, one on each side of the road over the .70 meter drainage canals lining the road in order to make possible the rapid dispersal of motor columns off the road in case of air attack. Also many bridges are constructed with forks in the road on each side of them to allow military columns to disperse rapidly. In 1931 several small roads were under construction connecting small towns in the vicinity of Vetka (52° 34' N, 31° 10' E). The Ministry of War, however,

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decided it was necessary to construct rapidly a main route over the Dnepr in this vicinity to Gomel' and ordered the discontinuation of the local road construction in order to mobilize all available manpower and equipment for the construction of the main strategic route. Another example of military considerations affecting road planning occurred in 1929 in Byelorussia when some roads were ordered to be built in a zig zag fashion in order to make them less vulnerable from air attack. In 1936 a third class road leading to a tin mine near the Mongolian border at the town of Khapcheranga (49° 42' N, 112° 10' E) was changed to a second class road and its route changed away from the tin mine in order to make possible a more strategic and direct approach to the Mongolian border.

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